

# Is the Holy Spirit Worthy of Worship?

By [Wayne Jackson](#)

Is the Holy Spirit **God** in nature? If so, is it appropriate to **worship** him?

There is a controversy that appears to be swirling about the Christian community these days, and it is this: "Is the Holy Spirit a proper object of Christian worship?" Some adamantly claim he is not. They challenge for a passage that specifically commands: "Worship the Holy Spirit."

But the issue is not whether one can locate a text that explicitly commands: "Worship the Spirit." There are many biblical propositions that cannot be established on the basis of a solitary "command-text." There is no text that explicitly puts all conditions of salvation into a single command. There is no single passage that instructs the Christian to eat bread and drink the fruit of the vine each first day of the week in order to commemorate the Lord's death.

These are solid propositions, but they are determined by what is called the synthetic analytical method, and not because there is an isolated, comprehensive command that embraces all components of the obligation.

Synthetic (cf. synthesis — "to bring together") study means that one assembles the relevant biblical information on the **same theme**, and then draws reasonable conclusions of action based upon a harmonization of the material. Let us consider, from the analytical viewpoint, what the Christian's attitude toward the Spirit of God should be.

## The Spirit Is a Person

Contrary to the ideas of some cults (e.g., the "Jehovah's Witnesses"), the Holy Spirit is a personality. He is referred to in personal terms (John 15:26; 16:7-8, 13-14). He acts as a person would act; he speaks (1 Timothy 4:1), he loves (Romans 15:30), he teaches (John 14:26), he intercedes (Romans 8:26), etc.

## The Spirit Is Deity

The Holy Spirit possesses the nature of deity (he is neither angelic nor human in essence). He is eternal (Hebrews 9:14). He is everywhere present (Psalm 139:7-10). The Spirit is omniscient, i.e., he knows "all things," yes, the "deep things" of God (1 Corinthians 2:10-11). He taught the apostles "all things" (John 14:26; 16:12-13). He was involved in the creation process (Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4; Psalm 104:30).

The Holy Spirit is spoken of in intimate association with both the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; John 14:16; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2).

Some passages in the Old Testament that are attributed to Jehovah, are applied to the Spirit in the New Testament (cf. Isaiah 6:8; Acts 28:25 and Exodus 16:7; Hebrews 3:7-9).

## Deity Is Worthy of Worship

A divine person is worthy of worship. Jehovah is "worthy to be praised" (Psalm 18:3). God is great and greatly to be praised (Psalm 48:1). We are commanded to worship God (Matthew 4:10; Revelation 19:10; 22:9). If, then, the Spirit is deity, he is a worthy object of worship. And what will be the consequence if one condemns others who engage in such worship?

Consider this logical point. If it is the case that Christ's acceptance of worship (Matthew 14:33; Luke 24:52) is a strong argument for the fact that he is divine, would not it likewise be the case that if the Spirit is deity, such would argue for the necessity of worshipping him?

Benjamin Warfield (1851-1921) was one of the most respected scholars in the conservative Presbyterian Church at the turn of the last century. He taught at the Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburg (1878-87) before becoming a professor of theology at Princeton. A half-century ago a volume of his writings was published that contained a masterful essay on "The Biblical Doctrine of the Trinity." One point Professor Warfield pursued relentlessly is the fact that the term

“God” is used countless times in the Scriptures in a generic sense. By that he meant that the sacred term frequently embraced the entire Godhead — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — rather than merely alluding to the Father alone. Here is his statement:

“Everywhere and by all it was fully understood that the one God whom Christians worshipped and from whom alone they expected redemption and all that redemption brought with it, included with His undiminished unity the three: God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit, whose activities relatively [sic] to one another are conceived as distinctly personal” (p. 49).

Noted scholar Francis Pieper stated that the worship of the Holy Spirit is “taught in all those Scripture passages where divine majesty, attributes, and works are ascribed to the Holy Ghost [Spirit]” (p. 387). The command to “worship God” includes the sacred Spirit.

## New Testament Precedent

In addition to the support from both “command” and “necessary implication,” as sketched above, there is a substantial case that may be made for the position that the Holy Spirit is worthy of human worship upon the ground of “example.”

(1) When the early disciples praised God, the work of his Spirit was included in the anthem (Acts 4:24ff). As one scholar noted, “this act of worship on the part of the disciples terminated on the Holy Spirit (Shedd, p. 331).

(2) Biblical literature abounds with a literary form commonly called a “benediction.” The benediction is defined as the “invocation of blessing, and the expression in prayer for happiness and well-being” (Purkiser, p. 217). These prayer offerings are found in the Patriarchal period (cf. Genesis 14:19-20; Hebrews 11:20-21), and in the Mosaic regime as well (see 2 Chronicles 30:27, and note the parallelism between the “blessing” and “prayer”).

The “benediction” motif is apparent also in some of the epistles of Paul (see: 1 Thessalonians 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:18, etc.). Of these benedictions, Michael Martin writes.

“Concluding benedictions requesting grace for his readers are common in Paul’s letters (cf. 1 Cor. 16:23; Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18) but [they] can show a fair amount of variety regarding the persons addressed (the Lord, the Father and/or the Spirit, by various titles) and the blessings requested (e.g., grace, peace, love, fellowship; cf. Rom. 15:33; 16:24, NIV margin; 2 Cor. 13:14)” (pp. 292-293; emp. WJ).

In this connection let us focus on 2 Corinthians 13:14. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.” Of this text Albert Barnes wrote: “It is a prayer; and if it is a **prayer** addressed to God, it is no less so to the Lord Jesus and to the Holy Spirit. If so, it is right to offer worship to the Lord Jesus and to the Holy Spirit” (p. 274 — emp. original).

In an excellent article on the nature of benedictions, Alfred Faulkner comments regarding this passage. “This verse prays for a holy fellowship in the Divine life mediated by the Spirit, and it is a fitting conclusion to an Epistle agitated by strife” (p. 147).

In his commentary on Paul’s second epistle to the Corinthians, Charles Hodge, the celebrated professor at the Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote: “The distinct personality and the divinity of the Son, the Father, and the Holy Spirit, to each of whom prayer is addressed, is here taken for granted” (p. 314).

In an essay on the “Trinity,” Loraine Boettner says that 2 Corinthians 13:14 “is a prayer addressed to Christ for His grace, to the Father for His love, and to the Holy Spirit for His fellowship” (p. 92).

Warfield describes the apostle’s benediction here as “a closing prayer” (p. 46). And Augustus Strong observed, “If the apostolic benedictions are prayers, then we have here a prayer to the Spirit” (p. 316). Barnett declares that Paul “prays that ‘the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit’ be ‘with’ them” (p. 618).

(3) There are several New Testament contexts in which the cooperative activity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the scheme of redemption are set forth, and in those contexts an anthem of praise flows from the apostles’ inspired pens (see: Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Peter 1:1-12). It is very difficult to see how anyone could reasonably conclude

that only the Father is the object of such adoration.

(4) Psalm 95 is a marvelous song erupting in praise for God. It begins: “Oh come, let us sing unto Jehovah; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise unto him with psalms” (vv. 1-2). Then, a little later: “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before Jehovah our Maker: for he is our God” (vv. 6-7). The text then proceeds with a rebuke to the nation of Israel. The people are admonished not to harden their hearts, as their fathers did in the wilderness, when they “tempted me.” Note this first person pronoun.

The same God who was worshipped was, at other times, “tempted” by Israel. Now here is the amazing thing. When these words from Psalm 95 are quoted in the book of Hebrews as a warning to certain Christians who were in danger of apostasy, the words of the Speaker are attributed to the Holy Spirit (Hebrews 3:7-11). No other conclusion can be drawn than this. The same deity who was “put to the test” was also worthy of worship, and this at least included the Holy Spirit.

(5) References in the book of Revelation to the “seven spirits” (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) are almost uniformly conceded to be an acknowledgment of the Holy Spirit.

The number seven is used symbolically for completeness or perfection. Several arguments point in this direction. For example, the “seven Spirits” are encased in a “Trinitarian” format — “him who is and who was and who is to come” [the Father], the seven Spirits that are before his throne [the Holy Spirit], and from Jesus Christ [the Son]” (1:4). The “seven Spirits” operate in conjunction with Christ (3:1; cf. John 14:16-18; 15:26; 16:14).

In Revelation 4, out of the very throne of God proceeded lightnings and voices and thunders. Too, there were seven lamps of fire that represented the “seven Spirits of God” (v. 5). One scholar has observed: “The spirits are grouped with other manifestations of the theophany proper (lightning and thunder); significantly the seven spirits are never said to join in the adoration of God by this court (4:8; 9-11) (Paige, p. 1120).

In the scenes of both chapters 4 and 5, observe the close association of the Spirit with both the Lord God and the Lamb (4:5; 5:6). As praise profusely issues from the entire realm of the rational, spiritually-oriented creation, it is directed to the united operations of the Holy Three (4:8ff; 5:7ff). This clearly evinces the inclusion of the Holy Spirit in the worship that ascends from the earth.

Additionally, as John T. Hinds observed, “a blessing is invoked from the three” mentioned in 1:4. John petitions for “grace and peace” from “him who was and who is and who is to come” [the Father], and “the seven spirits,” and “Jesus Christ.” One should note the coordinating conjunctions connecting the three. Hinds argued that since it is wrong to pray to any one except deity, the conclusion that follows demands that the “seven spirits” must be a reference to the Holy Spirit (p. 20).

## **The Testimony of the Patristic Writers**

Joseph Bingham, in his celebrated work, *The Antiquities of the Christian Church*, has provided a mountain of evidence establishing the fact that the Christians of the early post-apostolic age did not hesitate to offer worship to the Holy Spirit (pp. 586ff). For example, in a letter that was circulated by the church in Smyrna following the death of Polycarp (c. A.D. 69-155), a disciple of the apostle John, who was being burned alive, these words were recorded:

“Wherefore also I praise you [God, the Father] for all things, I bless you, along with the everlasting and heavenly Jesus Christ, your beloved Son, with whom, to you and the Holy Spirit, be glory both now and to all coming ages. Amen”  
(*Epistle from Smyrna*, XIV).

The epistle also closes with a benediction of “glory for ever and ever” to Lord Jesus Christ, the Father, and the Holy Spirit (XXII).

In the *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Roberts & Donaldson, Eds.), there is the record of an ancient Christian hymn with these words: “We praise the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit of God” (p. 298). Testimony of this nature can be multiplied many times over.

Professor Everett Ferguson is the premier authority of general church history among churches of Christ. His scholarship is respected far beyond our own borders. In his book, *Early Christians Speak*, he calls attention to a hymn from the Oxyrhynchus collection (A.D. 3rd century) that calls for “the praise of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” (p. 160). Ferguson also notes that while prayers were normally rendered to the Father, there is evidence of prayers to both God and Christ, and sometimes to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (p. 143).

## Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, it is somewhat perplexing to read the sentiments of one who writes: “Since the Holy Spirit is divine, is it proper to worship him? Yes, in fact, it is wrong **not** to worship him” (Cottrell, p. 286; emp. original).

But Professor Cottrell, whom I respect though not always agreeing with him, then says: “there are no biblical examples or precedents for addressing the Holy Spirit directly in praise or prayer.” With due respect, we believe the evidence introduced above demonstrates otherwise. Besides, if one cannot directly praise the Holy Spirit — either in song or prayer — **how** is such worship to be rendered?

For years Christians have sung hymns in which the Spirit of God was praised along with the Father and the Son. A Latin hymn from around A.D. 350 was popularized by Greatorex in 1851:

“Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.”

Bourgeois’s composition (1551) has these familiar lines:

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow,  
Praise Him, all creatures here below;  
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts;  
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Heber’s famous song (1826) has these lyrics:

Holy, holy, holy! Lord God Almighty!  
All thy works shall praise thy name, in earth and sky and sea;  
Holy, holy, holy! Merciful and mighty!  
God in three persons, blessed Trinity!

We can only ask respectfully, therefore; whence the origin of this new notion that **only the Father** is worthy of human worship?

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John 15:26, 16:7-8, 13-14; 1 Timothy 4:1; Romans 15:30; John 14:26; Romans 8:26; Hebrews 9:14; Psalm 139:7-10; 1 Corinthians 2:10-11; John 14:26, 16:12-13; Genesis 1:2; Job 33:4; Psalm 104:30; Matthew 28:19; John 14:16; 1 Corinthians 12:4-6; 2 Corinthians 13:14; 1 Peter 1:2; Isaiah 6:8; Acts 28:25; Exodus 16:7; Hebrews 3:7-9; Psalm 18:3; Psalm 48:1; Matthew 4:10; Revelation 19:10, 22:9; Matthew 14:33; Luke 24:52; Acts 4:24; Hebrews 11:20-21; 1 Chronicles 29:27; 1 Thessalonians 5:28; 2 Thessalonians 3:18; Galatians 6:18; Philippians 4:23; Colossians 4:18; Romans 15:33, 16:24; 1 Corinthians 13:13; Ephesians 1:3-14; 1 Peter 1:1-12; Psalm 95; Hebrews 3:7-11; John 14:16-18, 15:26, 16:14; Revelation 4

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